

It's been a whirlwind by Jancys-Blue-Bayou

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Summary: War correspondents AU: Nancy and Jonathan's paths cross in Vietnam in 1968, she a war correspondent for the New York Times, he a war photographer for AP.

1. Chapter 1

A/N: And now for something completely different... day 5 of Jancy Fanfic Week is AU day. This is a weird idea I had for awhile, placing Nancy and Jonathan in the 60s as war correspondents in Vietnam (going along with the h/c of Nancy becoming a reporter and Jonathan a photographer). This then became long as hell (I didn't want to chop it up into chapters) and has a bit of everything listed in the tags. I promise it's fluffy in the end, you know me. Also this was inspired by movies like Good Morning Vietnam (you'll see) and Platoon and very loosely on real events. The little research I did was on Wikipedia so I'm sure there's a lot of historical inaccuracies in it but I claim artistic license. Nothing is directly based on real events (except a photo mentioned in the beginning which is a real photo, and mentions of a specific battle).

"Small world," she says as she walks up to him. He turns around, surprised but soon a crooked smile forms on his lips.

"Small world," he mirrors.

"Hi," she greets properly, smiling at him and moving some elusive strands of hair that keeps falling out of her messy ponytail.

"Hi," he mirrors her again.

"Long way from Hawkins," she says.

"Yeah."

"What are the odds?" She asks him.

And herself. What are the odds of two people from Hawkins High class of '64 both ending up in a press tent in Saigon four years later?

"I don't know," he smiles.

She remembers that smile vividly. Not that they were ever *that* close. He had mostly kept to himself, never seeming to make an effort to socialize. Always behind his camera. They'd been friendly, though.

Their little brothers had been best friends since they were six years old and he'd often come around to her house to pick up or drop off Will. She'd say hi, make small talk with him sometimes. He seemed to appreciate it. Would actually talk, which he never did in school unless he had to. Always so quiet. Other kids made fun of him sometimes, she knew. She never liked that. Just because he was quiet and bit awkward, and because his family didn't have a lot of money and his dad had run off. It wasn't until later she figured out that maybe he didn't have any friends because he was always busy taking care of his brother or working extra to help out his mom.

There had also always been a little fluttering of... something, there, she felt. For him. She'd always found him weirdly cute. But she never acted upon it in high school, focusing on her grades instead (except for that brief fling with Steve Harrington which was mostly teenage rebellion and to prove to herself and that bitch Carol that nerdy Nancy could get the most popular boy in school). She'd lost track of Jonathan a bit after high school, when she'd gone off to pursue her dream of becoming a journalist. She knew from Mike that Jonathan had kept up with the photography and eventually, after some pushing from his mom and brother, eventually got out of Hawkins. That had made her happy for his sake. She was glad for everyone who got out of the tiny claustrophobic town. She couldn't imagine going about life like most of her former classmates, being content to stay in town or at least Indiana, get a cushy job and house and slowly morph into their parents. Screw that, she wanted to see the world.

Which had now brought her all the way here, to Saigon. To the War. She'd only been here for just over a month, going around different parts of southern Vietnam, keeping track of US troop movements, trying to keep up to speed as the war developed. Trying to make sense of it all. Back home she'd covered a lot of the student protests. The longer it went on, and the more news that got back from southeast Asia, the less sense it made to her, the War. Both the purpose for it and the way it was fought. It had dragged on for so long, and she didn't see an end to it anytime soon, regardless of how the President and his staff tried to spin it.

Going over here hadn't answered any questions for her, only reaffirming her beliefs. It had been jarring the first few days, being

here, out on the frontlines in a war zone. She'd gotten used to it somewhat now. She was proud to be there. That her editor sent her. The look on some of the men's faces in the office had been worth it alone. When she'd called home her mother had been immensely worried of course and her father had said that it was no place for a woman. Which hadn't surprised her. Mike had been worried too, but more supportive. Had even joked, saying "Better you than me." His number didn't get drawn in the draft lottery, to everyone's great relief. He'd told her neither Will nor Dustin had been called up either, Will's asthmatic problems had made him exempt and Dustin's number didn't get drawn either. But Lucas had been called in, to Mike's great distress. He'd told her to say hi to him if she saw him. She'd told her Vietnam was a big place.

But then again not so big, apparently.

"How are you?" He asks.

"Good. I mean, as good you can be, here," she answers. He smirks a bit at that. "So you're with AP?" She asks, gesturing to the press pass that's hanging around his neck.

"Yeah. You're still with the Times?"

So he knows that, she notes.

"Yes."

"Cool. I've read some of your stuff."

"And?"

"It's good. Wouldn't have expected anything else from you though."

"Thanks."

"How long have you been out here?"

"A month. Got into Saigon yesterday. You?"

"A couple of months now. Came here earlier this week."

"Captured anything interesting?" She asks, gesturing to his camera.

"Not lately. It's been pretty calm since I got here."

"Yeah I heard that yesterday. But they say..."

"Yep. The calm before the storm."

She nods.

"What do you got? Heard anything?"

"Not much more than what came through the official channels, with the troop movements to establish a perimeter. But people think there's more brewing. Tom at the Herald says he heard rumblings that they might be planning air strikes. But his sources are always hit and miss so. Lee at the Post thinks that there a lot more Viet Cong around here than we know. Or at least that the Generals think there's a lot more Viet Cong here than we know."

He nods.

"You hungry?"

"Yeah."

The fighting is mostly at night and for the past few days have been mostly out in the wilderness. Viet Cong forces lurk in underground tunnels only miles away and US troops spread out, looking to gain some kind of strategical advantage. Saigon is under US control. Life in the city somehow carries on. They can go into a restaurant, frequented by both US soldiers and war correspondents like them, and eat. The absurdity of war.

"So, where have you been, before?" She asks as they sit down at a table near the restroom after greeting some colleagues from different news outlets in the packed restaurant.

"Here and there. Huế mostly."

"Wow, that must've been awful." The Battle of Huế had raged for months on end and been very bloody. The Tet Offensive in full effect.

It had been one of the reasons that motivated the paper to send her over as well, they felt they needed more people on site as the war escalated. Though that particular battle ended just before she arrived.

"Yeah, it was. Got some good shots though."

She thinks for a second. There was a particular photo she remembered vividly. It had come through AP, she was pretty sure of it.

"Did you... did you take the photo of the soldier carrying the old woman out of the hospital?"

"Yeah," he nods.

"Great photo."

"Yeah. Think that was the one humane act I saw at all there," he notes, sadly. She nods, understanding.

"Anyway, how's life been? How long have you been with AP?"

"A bit over a year."

"And before that?"

"Well, I got work at Hawkins Herald in high school..."

"I remember."

"And after graduation they hired me full time. But then there was an opening at the Indianapolis Star and I got it, in the autumn. Worked there for a year, it went well. Then I got a job at the Sun in Chicago. Worked there until AP came along and sent me here."

"Wow, you've really worked your way up."

He shrugs. "How 'bout you? Always been in New York, right?"

"Yeah. I got a foot in at the Tribune right after college, then the Post for awhile, then the Times hired me."

"That's great. New York was always my dream."

"Where do you live now?"

"Uh, not really sure. Kind of up in the air for the moment. I was still based in Chicago but I got rid of my apartment when they sent me here, figured I'd be here awhile, and I was tired of Chicago anyway. Hope they'll reassign me when I get back. Whenever that is."

"To New York?" She smiles.

"We'll see," he answers and that small crooked smile finds its way across his lips again. "Worst case I'll crash at my mom's for awhile."

"How is she? And Will?"

"Good, last I heard. Haven't been able to talk to them much since I got here, of course. You still in touch with your folks?"

"Kind of, but mostly Mike. Mom and dad don't like me being here."

"My mom worries too."

"Yeah, I get that they're worried. Could do without the 'that's no place for a woman' thing though."

"Your dad said that?"

"Yep."

"Huh, he doesn't know you well, does he?" He smirks.

"Nope," she smiles before turning serious. "How close have you... have it gotten to you?" She wonders. She knows that everyone's who's been out here awhile has stories of close calls and brushes with danger. She's been lucky to so far only have witnessed stuff, not being in acute danger herself.

"Uh, bomb went off near me a couple of weeks back," he says, rolling up a sleeve. "Got hit by some shrapnel here," he shows off a distinct red mark on his arm near his elbow with several gashes that's scarring.

"Shit."

"It's not so bad. Was worse with the hearing for a couple of days. Those things are *loud*," they way he intones the last word makes them both smirk.

She watches him in silence for a few moments while they eat. She likes that he's more talkative now. Seems more confident. Probably the effect of escaping the Hawkins bubble and getting out there in the world. He looks good, too. More toned features, broader over the shoulders. The brown hair still messy and sideparted. And there's that little smile again, as he looks up and catches her staring. He shyly flickers with his gaze for a second, looking between her and the table. She feels herself almost blushing a bit.

A man who looks to be in his late forties or early fifties stops at their table on his way to the restroom.

"Hey kid," the man greets Jonathan who looks up.

"Oh, hey Paul," Jonathan smiles. "You good?"

"Great, nothing beats sitting here waiting for the shit to hit the fan," Paul replies dryly, chuckling lightly at himself.

"Tell me about it," Jonathan chuckles with him. "Uh, Nancy this is Paul, Paul this is Nancy from the New York Times."

"Hey, nice to meet you, I'm Paul Amblin, I put the PA in AP," Paul jokes as he shakes her hand.

"Nice to meet you," she smiles.

"So, you heard anything new?" Paul asks.

"Not really, Nancy's telling me there's some talk of them suspecting it to be more Viet Cong out here than we know," Jonathan replies.

"Unconfirmed though," she adds.

Paul nods. "If nothing happens today I think we better head out tomorrow and see what's going on."

"I was thinking the same," she says. Jonathan nods.

"We'll talk later. Carry on with your date," Paul says with a small smirk and heads off towards the restroom.

"It's not a da-" Jonathan starts to call after him but stops himself when Paul disappears from view. He looks back at her. She can't help but smile at him and he blushes.

"So," she starts and tries to think of a way to break the tension. "Did I tell you about the time I saw Andy Warhol at the grocery store?"

When they leave the restaurant she's in the best mood she's been in since she left the US, by far. They used the rest of their time to catch up and talk about normal things. Warhol, New York weather, Kubrick, their little brothers, Velvet Underground, the best and worst things about Hawkins, The Beatles. About the world changing. She finds it so easy to talk to him, she wonders why she didn't do it more back in high school.

Out in the street she turns to him.

"So uh, do you wa-"

She's cut off by the world seemingly exploding.

For a second she blacks out. When she opens her eyes again she is on the ground. Jonathan is on top of her, shielding her from it, whatever it was, anything, everything. His face hovers above hers. He stares down at her with panic evident in his eyes. He's saying something, shouting something but she can't hear because of the ringing in her ears.

"-ancy?" He repeats, cupping her cheek gently. His voice is penetrating the ringing now. "Are you hurt?!"

She shakes her head no. She flexes her fingers and her toes. He helps her to a sitting position and keeps a hand on her back while they look around. Debris litters the street. The restaurant is now a pile of flaming rubble. Nothing else seem out of the ordinary.

They stand up. He lets go of her to raise his camera, snapping of a couple of photos, acting automatically, out of habit. He looks like he's not fully there, present in the moment. The full weight of what's

happened comes crashing down on her. She grasps his hand reflexively, lacing their fingers together. It's like that's the only thing keeping her sane and upright in that moment. It seems to bring him back to earth aswell.

"Jesus," he says, almost in a whisper.

She's been, they've been, frozen to the spot but suddenly she feels her feet moving. He follows as she runs over to the rubble. They look around. Listen. No movement, no sounds from any human. No survivors. She's been in Vietnam for almost a month. She's seen dead bodies before. But never so many at once. And never civilians. Reporters. Colleagues.

Jonathan spots something and rushes forward. Crouching down he starts to move away rubble. She crouches down next to him and helps him, recognizing the blue shirt under it all. They dig out Paul. He's pale and unmoving. She checks for a pulse even though they both know there can't possibly be one. Jonathan wipes at his eyes quickly. She puts a hand on his shoulder. He takes a deep breath and looks over his fallen coworker. He reaches out and salvages the camera still hung around Paul's neck.

They stand up and starts to walk around and she counts the dead. Army personnel is sweeping down on the scene now and other journalists starts to arrive. He takes a couple of more photos, showing the destruction. She makes notes in her head of how many of the dead are military, how many are civilians. How many are journalists.

The army personnel swarm around now so they leave the scene, rushing back to the press tents. She starts typing at a maddening speed on the teleprinter to get word out to New York. They're 12 hours ahead and she'll screw over the print deadline but they can halt the printing for a big story like this. Jonathan rips a phone off its hook and furiously dials a number. She simply writes out the facts straightup, they can clean it up in New York.

"Get me Joe!" Jonathan shouts into the receiver next to her.

BOMB ATTACK AT SAIGON RESTAURANT

"There was a bombing!" He shouts.

A RESTAURANT IN SAIGON FREQUENTED BY MANY AMERICAN JOURNALISTS AND SOLDIERS WAS DESTROYED IN A BOMBING AT 1400 HOURS TODAY LOCAL TIME.

"Yes I've got pictures, I was outside! But listen-... yes I'll get them out ASAP, I... Shut up! Listen: Paul's dead! He's fucking dead!"

NO SURVIVORS INSIDE. AT LEAST 27 CASUALTIES – 11 SOLDIERS, 9 CIVILIANS, 7 JOURNALISTS FROM VARIOUS NEWS OUTLETS

"I dug out his fucking body! I've got his camera... no... no I don't know how many dead," he says even though he's reading what she's writing. She looks at him. She'd never ask for it but he's letting her have the exclusive, she'll be the one to break it.

THE EXPLOSION OCCURRED INSIDE THE BUILDING, BLOWING DEBRIS OUTWARD IN A WIDE RADIUS

Jonathan hangs up the phone with a heavy sigh.

POSSIBILITY OF EITHER A PLANTED BOMB OR SUICIDE ATTACK

She tacks on a note to her editor at the bottom:

SOURCES: MY OWN EYES, I WAS OUTSIDE. CONTACT AP FOR PHOTOS. NONE OF OURS AMONG DEAD. AP LOST ONE, THEY ARE INFORMED. CONTACT THE FOLLOWING:

He nods as she writes the part about the photos. She'll break it but it's not much without his photos. She then lists the other news outlets affected and puts the initials of their fallen journalists because who knows how long it will take the official channels to contact them all.

The other journalists are starting to return now, rushing for their equipment. Questions rain down on them but they slide away, trying to find peace in a solitary corner. Jonathan sees another guy from AP though, whispers that he'll be right back and disappears into a tent with his colleague, he has to pass on the film and Paul's camera. She finally slows down and looks around. Her head is pounding. The noise level suddenly feels insane. She's sure she can *hear* her

heartbeat. She feels her breathing speed up and something pressing down on her chest. And when did it get so hard to focus her gaze? The world feels a bit blurry around the edges. Someone's saying something to her, she thinks.

"-ncy. Nance."

He's back, she sees now. He's looking worriedly at her again.

"Let's go," he says and gently leads her away from the press tents, away from all the people and the noise. They sit down and he urges her to just breathe. She does. The noise level drops, her vision slowly becomes clearer, her heartbeat slows down. She becomes aware again. Of her surroundings. Of the warmth of his hand on her back. He passes a canteen to her and she drinks from it, she hadn't realized it before but her throat felt completely dry.

"Thanks."

"Better?"

"Yeah. Are you okay?"

He nods but shrugs at the same time.

"I don't know."

"I'm so sorry about Paul."

Another nod.

"You two were close?"

"He was great. He recommended me for the job. And showed me the ropes over here. I can't believe he's just gone."

"It will take time for it to settle in. When Barb passed I couldn't deal with at all for months... a year. And I'm still not over it. Will never be."

"I'm sorry about Barb."

"Thanks."

They sit in silence for a minute.

"Thirty seconds," she says.

"What?"

"If we'd stayed thirty seconds longer in there we wouldn't be here right now. If we'd gotten our food just a little bit later, if we'd eaten just a bit slower, if I'd gone to the bathroom..."

"We can't think about that, we'll go crazy."

"Feels like I'm halfway there."

"No you're not. Will take more than a bomb blast to throw Nancy Wheeler off her game," he says with that crooked smile again.

It makes her smile again, for the first time since the bomb.

"What were you going to say?" He asks.

"What?"

"Before... when it went off, you were saying something."

"Oh... I was just wondering if you wanted to maybe team up. Go out into the villages, see what's happening, out there. I heard they're moving out more troops from the 25th to try and establish a perimeter to draw the enemy out east."

"Sure."

"Nancy!" A voice calls out, causing them both to turn their heads. It's Tom, her co-worker. "New York wants you to write out a longer first hand account!"

"Okay!" She calls back while they rise to their feet.

The hours pass in a blur. She quickly writes a longer firsthand account for New York. Then she writes out several other pieces they might use. Jonathan goes off with the other AP guys again to deal

with his stuff. New York confirms that they got the story in the morning papers and then in the evening CNN wants to interview her for the morning news back home. She says yes since her editor wants to and manages to get through it without freezing up which she feared she would. Then she starts to do more research and plan for tomorrow. They'll get a ride with the 25th when they head out in the morning. After having gone through everything twice she feels sufficiently satisfied with her planning and finds Jonathan to present it to him. They wander off a bit to find to get some privacy. He has no objections to it so they soon get down to iron out the finer details.

"So they'll move out along this line," she begins, tracing the map. They both lean over it, heads almost touching. "There's already squadrons stationed here, here and here, so we could check it out or-"

An explosion in the distance jolts them both. They instinctively grasp each others hand.

"Just a grenade," Jonathan says after they've regained their breath. She nods. Night has started to fall so the fighting has started again out there. The guerilla tactics of the Viet Cong meant they always preferred fighting in the dark.

"Right," she mumbles and looks down at their interlocked hands. He looks down too and awkwardly pulls back his hand. She kind of wishes he hadn't.

"Uh, so what were you saying?" He asks to get them back on track, but her thoughts are elsewhere.

"That's not good. We can't do that," she realizes.

"Do what?" He asks.

"Jump at loud noises."

"Oh. Yeah. But hey, it's okay. And it'll pass."

"Will it?"

"Yeah. I was skittish for a few days after I took the shrapnel in the arm, but you get over it."

"I hope you're right. I can't be skittish and jump every time something blows up."

"It's okay to react like that, Nancy. We're journalists, not soldiers."

"I can't. Do that. I'm the only female correspondent here. I can't look scared," she says firmly.

She glances at him, wondering what he'll say to that. Still insist that it's okay when it's really not? Be condescending? She braces herself for whatever the answer may be.

But he just nods instead. Then he asks her a question.

"How long have you been here?"

"32... 33 days."

"Will you be here tomorrow?"

"Yes?"

"Then you're not scared," he says. And that's that.

They hitch a ride out with the troops moving out in the morning. When they're standing around waiting for the trucks in the convoy to fill up, they've been told they can get on the last one, a voice suddenly calls out.

"Nancy? Jonathan?"

They both turn around and see a soldier approach them.

"Lucas!" They both call out at once. She gives him a hug.

"What are you doing here?"

"Covering what you guys are up to," Jonathan says.

"Alright. Shit, I haven't seen you guys in forever."

"Yeah, how you been? Holding up okay?" She asks.

"Could be worse, I guess. How are things back home? How are the guys? I miss everyone."

"They're good, they miss you too," Jonathan answers.

"Yeah, Mike's worried about you. Me too," she adds.

"Yeah I'm worried about me too," Lucas says and chuckles a bit. "And now about you too, I can't imagine going here if I weren't forced to."

"We're like you, we do as the boss says," Jonathan shrugs.

"Plus we're not in the line of fire. Mostly," she adds.

"Still. I heard about the bomb yesterday, a bunch of your guys got killed?"

"Yeah. We were right outside," she informs him.

"Shit."

They get on the last truck together with Lucas and the rest of the platoon he's a part of. She asks him about his experiences in the war and he tells her. About where he's seen action, about nightlong firefights. He looks so different. She remembers the kind and funloving boy she'd watch grow up in tandem with her little brother. He'd always kept that sweet nature even through his teens, always quick to smile and fiercely loyal to his friends. Now he looked markedly older for the first time. Hardened. He still flashed that wide, toothy smile a couple of times, cracking jokes with the other privates. She guessed he was loyal to them in much the same way as he'd always been to his friends. But there was also something else there. It was in his eyes. Loss of innocence, perhaps.

Lucas asks Jonathan to take his picture and he obliges. Soon other soldiers but in with the same request and Jonathan dutifully takes pictures. He told her yesterday he's done that a lot, everyone wants a picture of themselves or with their friends to keep or to send home.

"That's sweet," she says and points to his helmet. Most soldiers have taken to write something on their helmets. Sometimes a slogan, a joke or a funny quote, sometimes the name of a loved one or

something else. Lucas' helmet has MADMAX on it next to a crudely drawn heart.

Lucas offers his widest smile of the day as he thinks about Max. He takes off his helmet. Jonathan asks a few other soldiers sitting around them to take of theirs aswell and hold them up next to Lucas'. It makes for a great picture, all the helmets with differing messages next to each other.

The aim is to set up a longer defensive line stretching through several smaller villages and the wilderness between them. Lucas' platoon has been assigned to secure an area that encompasses two villages and the surrounding woods. Lucas is with a group of soldiers under Sgt. Driver's command. The lieutenant takes Driver's group out to secure one village while Sgt. Hargrove will lead a team to the other one. That one is of no strategical importance "But we'll have to check it out anyway, there's still a chance they aid the gooks," as the lieutenant puts it. Everyone is then ordered to rendezvous in the village that Driver's group will secure.

They choose to stick with Lucas. They're not really expecting to witness anything particularly interesting, but through Lucas they could get a lot of access and a good opportunity to get close to the regular soldiers view of the war. They find the village already deserted, which isn't surprising. Lucas tells her that's most often the case on these sort of missions. They do a thorough job of checking the entire village and the surroundings though, to make sure.

And then they wait. And wait, for Sgt. Hargrove's unit to link up with them. They're taking way too long. Sgt. Driver resolves to send Lucas and a couple of others to check what's going on. They tag along. It's only a mile or so to walk. Halfway there they encounter Sgt. Hargrove and his men coming up on the small dirt road.

"What the hell took so long?" Corporal Dennison calls out.

"It looked like they'd been hiding some Viet Cong members," Sgt. Hargrove answers.

"Well did you find any?"

"Nah, but we had to be thorough."

Sgt. Hargrove's group links up with theirs and everyone starts walking back to the others. But she discreetly pulls Jonathan away and back.

"What?"

"I think that was all bullshit," she says, looking long after Sgt. Hargrove.

"What do you mean?"

"I think something happened."

"What makes you say that?"

"I don't trust that guy. Something Lucas said before, that he used to be under Hargrove's command but hated it and managed to get a transfer. And... he's got scratches on his arms and I thought I saw some blood on his pants. Didn't look like that before."

Jonathan nods slowly.

"It's just a hunch. But I think something's up."

"Let's go," he says and they start walking in the opposite direction of the others, who doesn't seem to have noticed their absence.

It's eerily quiet in the very small village. If they suspected that the villagers were hiding Viet Cong – where are all the villagers? They can neither see nor hear a single soul as they walk into the small community. They look around, no one's out on either of the only two streets who runs through the village, intersecting in the middle, and there isn't light or movement in any of the few simple houses. Walking around back of the largest house they find everyone.

Dead. The sight makes them both stop in their tracks, horrified. In front of them is a pile of bodies. A few vietnamese men, but mostly women and children. Girls. Most women are either completely or partially naked. It's obvious to both what happened to them. It's by far the worst thing she's ever seen. Before she can help it she feels her

stomach turn. She turns to the side and throws up on the ground. Jonathan's hand rubs circles on her back. She wipes her mouth and looks up. His face has paled.

"Ph-photos," she gets out, having recovered her brain goes into overdrive. They have to expose this. The world has to know this. What is happening here.

Jonathan nods, seemingly shaken out of a daze. He steps closer and starts taking pictures from different angles, showing the horrific sight, but no closeups. When he's done she steps closer to the bodies. To her great distress she has to look at them more. How many? How old? She looks at them. Sees in detail what exactly happened to them. Counts them.

When she's done she has to walk off, get away from it. So she can breathe. She sits down. He follows and sits down next to her.

"Have you ever seen anything like this?" She asks.

"No. Never. I mean you hear stories of one or two soldiers doing... stuff," he says and she nods because she's heard the stories too. "But never like this."

"What's the time?"

"3 pm."

"We need to get back to HQ."

"Yeah."

"But we have to go back to them."

He nods.

It's as calm as when they left when they get back. Some soldiers are digging a trench, Lucas and others sit around eating rations. She marches right up to Sgt. Hargrove, Jonathan right behind her.

"Do you have anything you want to say?" She calls out, grabbing his and everyone else's attention.

"What the hell are you talking about?" He scoffs but she can see his gaze flicker around for just a second.

"We went back. Do you have a comment before I publish my story?"

"What the hell is going on?" The lieutenant calls out.

"There's thirteen women and children raped and killed in a pile back there! I'm asking the responsible command if he has any comment before I publish."

"Now wait just a minute," the lieutenant tries.

"Bitch you won't say a fucking thing," Hargrove sneers.

"You can't silence me, you fucking war criminal," she spits out, boiling over.

"We'll fucking see about that!" Hargrove rages, pointing his weapon at her. She freezes, but hopes it just looks like she's standing her ground. Jonathan immediately moves in front of her and before she can even think Lucas has appeared too, hand on his weapon but not raising it. She's pretty sure that would get him court-martialed.

"Back the fuck off," Jonathan growls.

"Make me, Photo Boy."

"Sergeant! Lower your goddamn weapon!" Lt. Hall orders.

Hargrove slowly obeys the order. She stares him down.

"Now everyone just calm the fuck down," Lt. Hall barks.

"Do you have a comment?" She whips her head around to face the lieutenant.

"She's lying!" Hargrove tries, pathetically.

"Hargrove shut up!" The lieutenant barks again. "No I don't have a comment!" He fires back at her. "Sinclair! Take the Jeep and get these two back to Saigon," he then orders.

"You knew he was like that, didn't you?" She asks Lucas when he's driving them back.

"Off the record?" He asks and she nods.

"Everyone knows. That him and his gang uses girls. I saw him go after one, a couple of months back, so I stepped in. He flipped out, it took the lieutenant to calm him down. The lieutenant just switched me over to Sgt. Driver's group and didn't talk about it again."

"Jesus."

"But that has to remain off the record. They'll know it came from me and I'll get hell for it."

"I won't use it," she confirms. "What we've got is more than enough."

A loud bang and the world, or at least the Jeep carrying them, is turned upside down. They must've driven over a mine. They're all thrown from the vehicle. The winds knocked out of her when she lands heavily on her side. She stays down, catching her breath.

"You okay?" Jonathan, who's already up off the ground, runs over and asks.

"Yeah," she answers when she's got air in her lungs again. She reaches out and he takes her hand and helps her up.

"Look out!" Lucas calls.

Something flashes by in the corner of her eyes and is suddenly right upon them. They reflexively put their arms out to ward off the offender. She feels a sharp pain in her hand as something cuts her, and Jonathan curses out too. Another bang and the assailant immediately falls to the ground. Lucas lowers his rifle. They look down to see an NVA member in heavy camouflage, some kind of long sharpened bamboo stick next to the corpse.

"Shit, you guys okay?" Lucas calls out while standing guard, wielding his weapon and looking around in every direction. They're on a small dirt road surrounded by forest on both sides.

"Fuck," she swears and turns her hand over, a deep gash runs along the palm. She glances to Jonathan, who's got a similar mark on his palm.

"Got us both," he notes.

Lucas takes off his bandana and then rips off a part of the sleeve of his shirt, handing both pieces of cloth over.

"This is all I've got, wrap it up as best you can. We got a move on foot."

Jonathan ties the bandana tightly around her hand to stop the bloodflow. She follows suit, wrapping up his. Her fingers linger in his palm for just a second. She looks up and meets his gaze. Has it really only been a day since they reconnected? So much has happened, it seems much longer. And she thinks she don't want to imagine the last 24 hours without him by her side.

Lucas calls out for them again and they get moving. Basically glued to each others side while Lucas leads the way a step in front of them. It's a completely nerve-wracking experience, making their way down the narrow road, knowing that at any moment the enemy could jump out from behind the trees and attack again. Or hell, not even jump out, just shoot from behind the trees. But they make it back to HQ in one piece.

She writes up her story, Jonathan goes to fix with the photographs. Then they visit sick bay to get their wounds properly bandaged. Priorities. Lucas reports to some other commander and awaits another transport back. They go to say goodbye, because they might never see each other again.

"Thanks for saving our lives and all that," she says, hugging him.

"Yeah, well..." he shrugs. Jonathan gives him a hug aswell.

"I'll get a picture back to Max, I promise."

"Thanks."

"Take care of yourself," she says, worried.

"You too. And of each other. I can't believe I didn't even know you two were together."

"We're not," they both answer at the same time, stepping apart.

"Uh... you sure about that?" Lucas asks, raising his eyebrows and grinning.

She blushes a little and glances to Jonathan who glances back shyly before looking away.

"Well, I'll see you guys back home," Lucas parts with.

"Bye."

Word has gotten out about their story. All their colleagues wants to talk to them. All military personnel avoid them like the plague. She feels physically and mentally exhausted. She asks him to join her and they go back to her little tent in the evening to get away from everyone. Everyone but him.

"How's your hand?" He asks, sitting down next to her.

"Okay. How's yours?"

"Okay."

"We didn't jump, today," he says. She nods and smiles.

"I wonder what they'll do."

"They'll have to give him a dishonorable discharge. They must."

"The worst part is, we saw one thing. Imagine the things that no one like us have seen."

"Yeah. But at least... exposing one thing is better than nothing, right?"

She nods.

"Thanks. For everything, for being there, with me," she says.

"Thanks for being there with me," he replies.

"You put yourself in between me and a gun."

He just shrugs. Like it wasn't the huge deal it was.

"Thank you," she says with more emphasis.

"No problem," he mumbles and looks down. Seemingly incapable of taking credit.

"We match," she smirks, holding out her left palm.

"Yeah," he chuckles lightly, holding his out too. She can't resist but to take his fingers in between hers.

"Can't believe everything that's happened since I saw you."

"Yeah," he murmurs, looking down at their interlocked hands.

"I'm glad I found you."

"Me too."

A bombing. A mine. A stealth attack. And yet what she can't get out of her head...

"I see them. Every time I close my eyes," she confesses.

He doesn't say anything to that. Only looking at her with sympathetic eyes. She prefers that over some bullshit answer designed to make her feel better.

"We just left them... there."

"There was nothing we could do," he says now. Because it's reasonable. It's true.

"I know. But still..."

"I know."

"Could you... stay here tonight? I don't want to be alone," she says.

Feeling incredibly small and vulnerable in that moment. "Do you?"

"No," he says quickly. And it makes her feel a little less vulnerable. She's not weak. He's not weak. But they're stronger together. "And, yeah, I'll stay," he adds.

She nods. Good.

She lies down on the simple cot. He lies down on the ground beside her.

"Thank God that Mike's draft number didn't come up," she says, staring up at the ceiling.

"Thank God for Will's asthma," he counters.

"God I hope Lucas makes it back."

"Yeah."

They're silent for a minute. Then Jonathan pipes up.

"For a second today I forgot that Paul was dead. I wanted to talk to him when we got back. Tell him what we saw, what we did."

"I'm sorry."

"I want to remember him. I want... others, to remember him. I don't know how. There's always his photos. They say something, about him too. But not everything. I wish I could write something about him. Never been much with words though."

"I could help you," she offers.

"What?"

"Write. He deserves to be remembered. I can help."

"Okay. Thanks."

"Where was he from?"

"New York. Brooklyn."

"So he got friends and family there?"

"Yeah."

"Who reads the New York Times?"

"Well I guess but-"

"We'll write it in the Times then."

"But they won't just-"

"Considering we just broke the two biggest stories of the war since the Tet Offensive began, I think they owe us some space around the obituaries. Especially for a new yorker like him."

"Okay..."

"I'll talk to New York tomorrow."

"Thanks."

"Goodnight."

"Night."

They're everywhere, everywhere she looks. In every direction she turns. Naked, bleeding bodies. Eyes wide, staring at her. She turns around and Mike is there. Mike and all his friends. They can't be here, they're just twelve years old. She shouts to them to get out. They point and she turns again. There's Hargrove and he's pointing his gun at Jonathan. She calls out but he fires. A bomb goes off with a bang and she's flying, flying through the air.

She wakes up with a start. She's drenched in sweat and tries to catch her breath.

"Nance?" He gently asks. He's sitting on the edge of her cot. He must've shook her awake. "It was just a dream. You're alright," he assures her, a hand on her shoulder.

She throws her arms around him and buries her face in the crook of

his neck. His arms go around her and holds her close. She swallows hard and breathes. Breathes in his scent. He smells of forest, gunpowder and something else, something that's just him. She feels almost safe for the first time since she stepped foot in Vietnam.

"Good?" He asks when she pulls back after awhile. She nods.

"Could you... stay up here?" She hates how she sounds in that moment. But loves that he nods a yes. She needs that, right now.

The cot is small, not made for two people. Even with her petite frame it's a squeeze. He has to lift his arm and she scoots into his side just so they can both fit. She doesn't mind that at all. She wants him close. Needs him close. She tries to go back to sleep but she can't. He doesn't either. So they lay awake and talk, about everything but the war. About home and their families and Hawkins and New York and music and books and the past and the future. He even makes her laugh. It's comfortable. So comfortable she even let's slip things she hasn't told anyone but Barb before. She confides in him about that too. About still missing Barb, so so much.

He tells her he's motivation for going to Vietnam was that the increased risk equaled increased pay which would help him a lot with his ultimate goal: having enough saved up to be able to send Will to college. He's been saving for that for years. While Mike was at IU, Dustin was at Northwestern and Lucas was here, Will was still in Hawkins, working Jonathan's old job at the movie theatre.

"He says he doesn't want to go to college all that much, but I know he's just saying it to make mom feel better. Mom knows it too. She saves up all she can but it's impossible, between feeding Will and herself and maintaining the house. And he deserves to go to college, he's so smart."

"Do they know that you're saving?"

"No. Well I think my mom suspects because I send less money home now. But I haven't told Will, I don't want to until I have enough to cover at least the first year. I think I'm nearly there."

"Do you know what he wants to do?"

"He wants to be an artist."

"He was always great at drawing," she nods.

"He's the best," Jonathan says proudly.

The dawn rises outside. They're still lying next to each other. They've stopped talking. She traces his jawline with her fingers and thinks again how comfortable she feels in his arms and how soft his lips seem. She looks up. He's staring down at her. Kind eyes looking down at her, not with pity, not with worry, with something else she can't quite place but she likes it. She presses her lips to his. Yes his lips are just as soft as she imagined and they eagerly respond to the kiss after a splitsecond. She caresses his cheek with her bandaged hand. He holds her with both of his as she shifts in his arms, fully facing him now. She deepens the kiss and he parts his lips. His tongue gently asks for a permission she's never been happier to grant.

His hands travel up her back, inside her shirt. Hers travel down his front, all the way down to the noticeable bulge in his pants. She slips her hand inside and feels him, strokes him. He moans into her mouth and after some fiddling she gets his cock out. She strokes him faster and faster and he grows and grows. He mumbles her name in between kisses and moans.

More fiddling and she frees herself from the last constraints. She positions herself, he holds her. She steers him inside of her. They moan in tandem. She thinks they fit perfectly together. His hand gripping her sides, holding her steady, her hands in his hair, messing it up. Her lips on his. Her hips rolling against his.

Yes, they fit perfectly. The world is perfect at this moment because it's only them, she and him. There is no war, only this. Bliss.

After a couple of more minutes of rolling hips and moaning lips heightening in pitch, he comes inside of her. She collapses down against him again. She thinks that she fits perfectly there too, in that spot in the crook of his neck. It seems tailor-made for her. He presses a kiss to the top of her head. She turns her head up and catches his lips between hers again.

They don't really talk about what they are, to each other. She doesn't really feel a need to. They just carry on. Spending their days working, often together but not always. And spending their nights lying together, talking. Sometimes more than talking. He tells her more about Paul and she helps him, formulating his words into a memorial. They learn that Sgt. Hargrove has been court-martialed and dishonorably discharged. They also learn that breaking stories like that come with the price of the army now doing everything in their power to work against them, being as unaccommodating as possible, the relative openness they experienced from them earlier in the war being lost she now has to fight even more to get her stories.

She knows what it looks like, objectively, the two of them. Brought together by adrenaline and the shared trauma of extreme circumstances, finding comfort in each others arms and once they're out of the dangerous environment they're in the spell will be broken. But the more she watches him, talks with him, listens to him, is silent with him, the more she thinks that she really wishes they would be out of this environment so they could do the same thing without the looming threat of a bomb dropping on them. She thinks that if they had bumped into each other somewhere more normal, on the street in New York for example, she would've asked him out for coffee and they could've taken it from there. But now this was simply how it was. She kind of thinks that while other relationships can build to a scenario where it's make or break when life suddenly gets *really* real, they started out in that end right off the bat. And what's wrong with that?

Though she knows the reason that they don't really talk about what they are to each other is because time rolls on and that daunting concept of The Future is very vague and fuzzy. As the weeks drag on she feels an increasing wish, want, need, to go home. Maybe she's starting to burn out. She's tired of the life here. The war feels never-ending. And it repeats in a vicious cycle, nothing really new, just slightly different versions of the same miserable violence over and over to report on. And she's more intrigued by what happens elsewhere. The college protests at home. The student riots in Paris. And in April MLK was shot. Why is everyone who stands up in this decade shot down? She talks with her editor about it. She guesses she had already worked up some credibility to even be sent here in the

first place, and she knows that her stock has risen with the stories she's broken. So her editor listens, says it'd be good to have her back on the home side too. They start to plan her exit, the logistics of sending someone else over to take her place takes some time.

She doesn't tell Jonathan at first, not until she has to. Because he's a star in the field of war photography. Yes she wrote the stories, but it's the pictures from the war that people remember. And he's got the best ones. So she assumes he'll remain. She puts off telling him of her plans until her editor lets her know that everything's set up and she's got a ticket home the next day. She goes searching for Jonathan and finds him, apparently in the midst of looking for her. They go back to her tent.

"I have to tell you something," they both say at the same time.

"You go first," he says after they've shared a laugh at their timing. She takes a deep breath.

"I'm going home," she says heavily. She looks up at him. He has an unreadable expression on his face. "What... what was it you had to say?" She prompts when he doesn't respond.

"That I was getting out of here. Going back home, I mean."

"What... I thought... I didn't tell you because I thought..." she can't formulate words properly. He smiles and captures her lips with his instead. She responds eagerly. When they pull apart for air she asks.

"Where will you go?"

"I don't know. They want me somewhere on the East Coast..."

She kisses him again.

"Well... do you need a place to stay?" She asks next. He responds with another kiss. She takes it as a yes.

"When do you leave?" He then asks.

"Tomorrow," she answers. At his somewhat dejected look she starts to apologize. "I'm sorry, I didn't want to tell you before it was definitive

and-"

"No, it's okay. Just, hang on," he says, determined.

He leaves her with another kiss and walks off quickly. She's very confused. He returns ten minutes later.

"I'm leaving tomorrow, too," he says.

"Wow. What power you have..." she murmurs, stepping into his embrace again.

"Well, apparently they're afraid they'll lose me to a competitor so they're pretty accomedating right now," he explains.

"That's nice. That they value you," observes before kissing him again. She feels ten times lighter knowing she's going home. They're going home.

The flight home is a nightmare of course, as they have to take a helicopter out, switch to a plane and then change planes and then the second plane has to stop to refuel. She's never been happier to see LaGuardia when they finally touch down late in the evening. She thinks to use a payphone to call her apartment and let Maggie, the junior reporter at the paper that's been subletting it while she's been gone, that she's on her way home. Then they take a cab straight home to the apartment. She hugs Maggie hello and quickly introduces her to Jonathan. Maggie, ever so polite, says she'll sleep on the couch. Normally her manners would mean she would in turn insist for Maggie to have the bed, but the reality of the situation is that she's completely beat and haven't slept in a real bed in months. Plus there's two of them. So she takes Jonathan and crashes down in her warm, comfortable bed and they sleep for twelve hours straight.

"Morning," she mumbles, peering at him. She can't quite believe they're waking up in her own bed.

"Morning," he replies.

"How'd you sleep?"

"Good. You?"

"Great."

"Hey I don't know about you, but I've got some vacation days saved up," he then says, sending her into a giggle fit.

"Yeah, me too," she gets out when she's collected herself.

It's noon when they get out of bed. Maggie's at work of course. Bless her heart, she left food in the fridge. And bless Jonathan, who insists on making her breakfast. He uses the stove and everything. She wonders if that's his routine or if it's to impress her. It does, nonetheless. She usually only works the toaster and the coffee maker in the morning. She can boil an egg too. But otherwise her best kitchen utensils are the fridge magnets holding up the takeout menus.

"This was great," she tells him while shoving a last mouthful of eggs in her.

"I'm glad," he smiles. "Um... so is this," he says and gestures between them. "Right?"

"Yeah," she says, and almost laughs because he says it like he wants to know if she thinks so too and to her it's the most obvious fact in the world.

"So uh, should we maybe talk about this, a little? And like, the future?"

"Sure," she answers. "Let's start with our futures. Respectively. Without regards to this," she gestures between them, "what's your plan for the foreseeable future?" She asks, because she figured out in the cab ride home that this would probably be best to get out of the way before they talk about anything else.

"Well uh, continue working for AP. Like I said, they want me on the East Coast. And... I like New York. What's yours?"

"Continue at the Times," she states simply. "Now, regarding us... I like you a lot, Jonathan. Like, uh, very... much a lot..." she winces at her wording. Goddamnit she's good with words, it's her job. And she

thought about this the whole cab ride home, how to eventually have this inevitable conversation. And she still stumbles over her words. But he just smiles more and simply says:

"I like you a whole lot too."

"Good. Good. And I care about you a lot... uh that probably goes without saying on account of the whole liking thing," she continues tripping over herself. She takes a breath and gathers her thoughts. "I feel like... it's been a whirlwind, everything with us and I know we met, or re-met, under extraordinary circumstances which affected it but I also feel like... it would've been extraordinary to meet you just on the street here at home too. Um, and I want to be with you and I hope you feel the same way and I think so long we're on the same page about that we can figure out everything else later like it doesn't matter, you can just stay here for now, I mean if you want, I don't know I-"

He interrupts her with a kiss that takes her breath away and makes her mind go blank.

"Sorry, I'm not good with words but uh... I feel the same way," he says when he pulls back.

"It's okay you're good with your lips," she just about manage to get out in a near-whisper before she leans in and kisses him again.

Later he asks to use her phone to call home.

"Hi Mom, it's me... yes it's really me... I'm back home... yes for real, I promise... in New York... well, you remember Nancy Wheeler?" He looks at her and smiles, continuing the phone call.

"Mom says hi," he smirks when he's finished with the call.

"Nice," she says, taking the receiver from him and dialing her parents phone number.

When she's done with her call they sit down to make a plan. They both want to go home to Hawkins to visit their loved ones. But first they need to deal with logistics. Namely, figure out how much vacation days they both have, run some other errands and book

tickets. No reason to waste time so they set out in the afternoon, she goes to the Times office and he to AP to get their time off. She's a bit overwhelmed when she goes into the offices, everyone wants to talk to her. She of course knew that her reporting had made an impact, but she wasn't prepared for it. She claims her vacation days and tells Maggie that she can stay in the apartment until she finds a new place and that she'll be gone for at least a few days. She then goes to meet Jonathan outside the AP offices on Liberty Street.

"All good?" He asks.

"Yeah, you?"

"Yeah. I need to go to the bank."

She's pretty sure he's the happiest anyone has ever been inside of a bank office when he cashes some paychecks and a bonus check, puts most of it in a savings account, has the teller read the amount and then withdrawing it all to a check. It's enough for Will's first year of college.

They go by Penn Station and book train tickets for the next day. Then only one thing remains on their to do list. They scan through a phone book and then takes the subway to Brooklyn.

The address is fairly easy to find. They walk up the steps of the brownstone and knock. A girl who looks to be about 14 answers the door.

"Hi, um, you must be Hilary?" Jonathan greets. She gives a small wave.

"Yes?"

"Nice to meet you, uh, is your mom home? My name is Jonathan, this is Nancy. Uh, I worked with your dad..."

Hilary looks at both of them with new recognition when he says their names. She nods seriously and calls back into the house for her mom. A woman soon joins them.

"Yes?"

"Hello, Mrs. Amblin, I'm Jonathan Byers, this is Nancy Wheeler. I worked with Paul. Sorry to disturb you but we just wanted to offer our condolences. He was a great photographer, and a good friend."

"Thank you," Mrs. Amblin starts. "That means a lot. And... you were the one who wrote the nice text about him in the paper, weren't you?"

"Yes."

"That was nice. I saved it."

"I'm glad. And uh, I've got something for you," Jonathan continues and opens his bag and takes out Paul's camera and hands it over.

"Thank you."

They're not completely sure what to expect when they get to Hawkins. They had talked to both of their mothers again last night to confirm that they had gotten train tickets. Her mom was a bit confused at first when basically the first thing she told her after "I'm home" and "I want to see you" was "By the way, Jonathan Byers is my boyfriend". To be honest she probably did a bad job of explaining it, but at least her mom eventually said "well I've always thought Jonathan was a nice boy" and "I can't wait to see you both". Jonathan relays that his mother too was confused but "let's just say, pretty enthusiastic".

Getting off the train in Indianapolis they start looking for a cab but a car honks incessantly at them. She turns around, ready to give the motorist an earful, only to discover her little brother behind the wheel, and in the passenger seat a curly head of hair she'd recognize anywhere.

"Hey sis!" Mike leans out of the window and shouts.

"Yoohoo lovebirds!" Dustin does the same on the other side.

Mike and Dustin get out of the car and she hugs her little brother tighter than ever before and he doesn't even try to resist. Then she hugs Dustin too for good measure.

"Jesus you guys almost look grownup!"

"Yeah yeah, get in the car, mom will kill me if we're late. And we have a lot to catch up on it seems," Mike answers, looking between her and Jonathan.

Of course. She's never really been willing to admit it to herself but she suppose she gets the affinity for making plans and scheming from her her dear mother. Mike lets her that between her phone calls yesterday their mom started frantically organizing a joint welcome home party together with Mrs. Byers.

"So, Jonathan, what are your intentions with my sister?" Mike begins in a put-on voice after they've put their bags in the trunk and sat down in the backseat.

"Uh..." Jonathan hesitates.

"Mike, don't think I didn't learn new methods with which to kill you in Vietnam," she glares at him through the rearview mirror and tries to stifle a smirk.

"Noted."

"But seriously guys, what uh... what happened?" Dustin asks.

They spend the rest of the drive to Hawkins filling them in on most... some... of what happened over there. She kind of speeds through the whole her and Jonathan getting together part to get to the for them more interesting bits that they don't know about, namely Lucas. They have a million questions about him of course and she tells them everything they want to know. Jonathan shows pictures.

Mike has to pull up at the curb outside their childhood home since the driveway is occupied by different cars.

"What's the police cruiser doing here?" Jonathan asks.

"Uh, you don't know dude?" Dustin starts. "Your mom and the Chief have become... closer, of late."

"Huh," she says.

"Oh," Jonathan musters. He looks to be thinking it over. "Alright then," is the conclusion he reaches. They step out of the car.

Dustin insists on carrying her bag which makes her smile and Mike roll his eyes.

"Ready for this?" She asks.

"Yep," Jonathan replies. She reaches out and opens the front door.

They are greeted by a bunch of people shouting "Welcome home" somewhat in unison. There's a banner with the same sentiment hanging in a doorway. It looks homemade but also skillfully made so she surmises it's Will's handiwork. She smiles as she looks around at her mom and dad, Holly, Mrs. Byers and Will and then Chief Hopper. Mike and Dustin cheer behind them.

Her mom steps forward and embraces her while both Mrs. Byers and Will run up to Jonathan and envelop him in a crushing group hug. Her mom releases her, giving her the opportunity to hug Holly tight before quickly hugging her dad as well. Eventually his family lets go of Jonathan too, he has a look of such genuine happiness on his face that it makes her heart swell. Hopper comes over and puts a hand on Jonathan's shoulder and shakes his hand, saying something. He gives her a nod too. Both of their mothers seem to be on automatic, Mrs. Byers pulls her into a hug saying it's so nice to see her too and out of the corner of her eye she can see Jonathan a little awkwardly returning her mother's enthusiastic embrace. She waves to Will, and Jonathan exchange a stale handshake with her dad.

"Well, we have a lot to talk about!" Mrs. Byers exclaims when the whole greeting procedure is finally over. Her mother shows everyone into the dining room.

Dinner takes a *long* time since they're peppered with questions and the answers sometimes turn out fairly long. Questions about them, about their work, about the war (they clean up the answers since Holly's present) and plans for the future. Jonathan gets a bit nervous when her father starts to grill him a bit on his career plans and such, but she tries to calm him by taking his hand under the table and giving it an encouraging squeeze. He's an accomplished war

photographer, he should be proud of that. Even her dad must respect that, even if it's probably more the war aspect than the photography bit. In turn they have their questions about what's been going on with all of them, but the others are more interested in steering the conversation back to them.

They sit down in the living room after dinner. She can see that Jonathan is somewhat antsy for a bit until he seems to decide something. She understands what from the way he glances at Will who's sitting next to Mrs. Byers in the sofa. Jonathan sits down next to him.

"So how's The Hawk?" He begins.

"You know, same old same old," Will smiles.

"Yeah. Um, hey buddy can I ask you something?"

"Sure?"

"Just, hypothetically, if money or nothing like that didn't matter, what would you like to be doing right now? Be honest, I know it's not working at the crummy movie theatre, I've been there."

"Uh... well, I mean, going to RISD, but it's fine-"

"No, no buts, just, hypothetically, that's what you'd like to do?"

"Yes."

"Okay," Jonathan reaches into his backpocket and looks between Will and his mom who both seem to be waiting for him to go anywhere with this. "This is for you, don't freak ou-" He starts, handing over the check to Will.

"Holy shit!" Will interrupts, silencing the whole room. Mrs. Byers eyes widen as she reads what it says.

"Jonathan-"

"How-"

"I've been saving. They pay you pretty decently when they send you into war with only a camera. That should cover you for the first year of college. Hopefully we'll have more or figured out something else by the time second year starts."

"Jonathan this is-" His mother starts again but stops to wipe her eyes.

"I- this, I can't-" Will stammers.

"Yes, you can. Please. I want you to have the chance to do whatever you want to do with your life."

"But this is your money..."

"Yes and this what I want to do with it."

Will stops protesting and instead hugs Jonathan tight. Hopper has managed to produce a handkerchief and passes it to Mrs. Byers who tries to wipe away tears. She herself tries to discreetly wipe at her eyes too. Thank God for Mike and Dustin who breaks the tension by clapping and whooping. Her mother looks almost teary-eyed too. Her dad looks stunned and then nods with respect.

They wrap up the evening. She follows the Byers family out because she and Jonathan then runs over nextdoor to the Sinclairs to give them some photos and hopefully uplifting stories about their son in the war. They're very grateful and also provides them with Max's address, she's back in California studying at UCLA but they're still in regular contact.

Jonathan kisses her goodnight. They haven't figured out their sleeping arrangement, or for exactly how long they'll stay in Hawkins, but they figure they should at least spend one night in their parents homes.

But is she really there? For a second she's unsure when she wakes up with a start a few hours later. Sitting up in bed, sweaty and panting. Darkness surrounds her. She was back there again. It was so vivid. The sights, the sounds, the feel. She was right back there. She just hopes she didn't scream loud enough to wake anyone. Doesn't seem

like it at least, it's completely quiet except for her heavy breathing. She knows it's ridiculous, she knows that there are other people in the house, people she loves and who loves her. But the silence and darkness makes her feel totally alone. And her remedy for it isn't to wake up Mike or her mom. No, she follows her first instinct which is to get out of bed on shaky legs, throw on some clothes and climb out through her bedroom window and down the roof. It's been years since she was a teenager doing this but the quickest and easiest way to climb down is still logged into her memory. Some things you never forget how to do.

The Byers house isn't far but she hates the walk she has to endure to get there. The forest surrounding the road on both sides for a good stretch evoking vivid memories for her. She tries to focus on the notable difference, the climate. She tries to welcome the feel of the chilly Indiana night because it's so far from the humidity she remembers from Vietnam.

She's faced with another problem when she finally arrives at their house. How to get in. She can't just knock on the front door, anyone of them could open it then. And it would mean a whole lot of explaining if someone other than Jonathan opened it. Plus she really doesn't want to bother them all. Just Jonathan, because that's necessary right now.

She walks around and tries to figure out which window is his, where his room is. It's been years since she was here last. And she's never spent a lot of time here, just picking up or dropping of Mike. She tries to work backward from that, trying to remember which room must be Will's, the one she's been in a couple of times long ago to drag Mike away from comic books and drawings. It's got to be this one, she's pretty sure. And that should mean that Jonathan's is the one on this side, because she's pretty sure the master bedroom is on the other side. She taps on the window. Taps again, a little louder. And again. Finally a rumbling inside and a shadow coming over to the window.

"Nancy?" Yes, she got it right.

"Hey. I... can I come in?"

"Yeah yeah, of course," he hastily answers and helps her in through

the window, closing it behind her. As soon as she's through she collapses against him, breathing in his familiar scent. His arms immediately go around her, holding her close. And safe.

"I had a..." she doesn't finish the sentence, she doesn't need to.

He gently leads her over to his bed and they lay down under the covers, as close as possible.

"It was like I was back there. It was so... real."

"I hear it's common. Flashbacks."

"I know," she answers. She read up on it before she even went. She went anyway, and doesn't regret it. But goddamn she hopes this won't last. She'd had nightmares often in Vietnam. But yesterday she slept peacefully and that first day back she was out like a log, so she, perhaps foolishly, assumed that the nightmares didn't come home with her.

"It'll be okay," he soothes.

She feels herself relax in his arms. She hopes he's right. She suspects he is. Maybe part of Vietnam came home with her. But at least he did too. That made her feel pretty sure that everything would be okay.

2. Chapter 2

She wakes up in an unfamiliar room in well-familiar arms. There's an old Bob Dylan poster on one wall, a Beach Boys one and an Andy Warhol print on the other. There's some records stacked on the floor and boxes with more in the corner.

"Morning."

She glances up at Jonathan when he utters the soft words. His kind eyes look down at her.

"Hey."

"Sleep okay?"

"Yeah. Good. With you."

"Good. I'm glad."

She adjusts a little in his arms, settling herself better in the crook of his neck.

"So this is your old room?" She asks while continuing to look around at the surroundings.

"Yeah. Mom kept it as is when I moved out. I told Will he could have it but he said he liked his own room. And it came in handy to store my stuff in when I got rid of my apartment in Chicago, before I left," he explains and nods towards the boxes in the corner.

"Cool. We should bring it back to New York with us."

"Oh. Sure? I don't want to impose or-"

"What? No. No. I mean if you want... I mean I don't mind... I want you... ugh. I just meant, I mean if you want to stay, at my place I mean."

"Would you like me to? Stay, I mean."

"Yes."

"Awesome. Then I'll stay."

"You don't have to-"

"No I want to. I want to be with you. I want to be in New York. So why... be anywhere else? Doesn't make sense."

"Right. Exactly. So yeah. I mean I don't know really how... I mean I guess it's kind of messy, like, life, right now and I don't really know how to... with relationships, I mean, I haven't really... focused, on them. Before. Focused on work."

"Yeah, yeah I mean, same. I have no idea what I'm doing."

"Me neither. I just know I want to be with you. All the time."

"Same."

"So I guess we just... work off of that? I mean what else is there to it? I want to be with you... right now I want to stay here for a couple of days to relax... then I want to get back to work."

"Yeah, same. Let's stay here for a few more days then we'll go back."

"Yeah. And we'll bring your stuff. At least your clothes. And records and whatever else you need."

"I just need you," he says, which makes her chuckle slightly while she feels all warm and fuzzy inside.

"Hah. Sure. Okay then I need you AND your records and stuff," she counters.

"Fair."

She turns in his arms and presses a kiss to his lips. Then plants more on his jaw as she lays her head back down in the crook of his neck.

"So... should I sneak back out through the window?"

"What? Don't be ridiculous. It's not like we're teenagers sneaking

around."

"No, I know, I just thought, since I snuck in during the night, your mom doesn't know I'm here it's uh... weird, and kind of rude?"

"She won't mind, we'll just explain it and she'll understand. She really likes you."

"Okay. I-"

They're interrupted by a knock, a voice and the door being opened before they can react.

"Jonathan sweetie are you up? Do you want- oh! Oh gosh, I'm sorry, so sorry! I didn't know-"

Mrs. Byers halts in the doorway and starts to profusely apologize when she sees her, why she's not sure.

"Mom it's okay," Jonathan says. They sit up in bed. At least they're dressed, she thinks.

"Hi, Mrs. Byers, I'm sorry I didn't um... sorry."

"Oh! No it's okay, good morning sweetheart, it's totally fine I just didn't know you were here, I thought you were staying with your parents tonight?"

"Yeah... yeah I was but uh... I kind of..."

"It's easier to sleep, together," Jonathan answers for her.

Mrs. Byers looks at them for a second and nods.

"Right. Yes of course, I understand and of course you're welcome here sweetie, I was just surprised that's all."

"Yeah, I'm sorry about sneaking in but uh, yeah. Didn't want to wake the whole house in the middle of the night so..."

"No of course! I understand, it's fine. How do you like your eggs?"

They get up and before sitting down in the kitchen she calls her

parents home and manages to sell them on the lie that she got up early to have breakfast with Jonathan. They stay in Hawkins for a couple of days, they have dinner with her family too but stay in the Byers house. It's so welcoming. Joyce and Will are both incredibly sweet and makes her feel right at home. Jonathan and her spend the days with their families or going on walks through town and the woods on their own, talking about everything. Not so much the past but the future, even though she guessed being back in Hawkins would make them reminisce, but she's really not nostalgic about this place. He's not either, except with regards to his family. For him Hawkins was mostly balancing school and work to help out his family and to get out of the town. For her Hawkins was just studying, her parents silent home and a dead best friend. So there's really not much to be nostalgic about. But it does offers a reprieve, from Vietnam, from the bustling Big City. The quietness of the small town is welcomed in that sense. But soon they both feel the draw to get back to work, back to their lives.

And it's busy times. On June 2 Andy Warhol is shot. Three days later Bobby Kennedy is killed so work is crazy. Most days they're both exhausted when they see each other again back in the apartment in the evenings. But she finds she always perks up when she sees him. And waking up in his arms every morning is bliss. Nightmares intermittently continues to plague both of them, but not every night. When they do the other one is always there to comfort. And most nights are filled with sleep. And other pleasant things.

She finds it fun to discover more about him, about them, as they live together, fall into a routine together. Routine, not a rut. She finds him really easy to live with. Really good to live with. They're both very organized people, but in slightly different ways so they complement each other, she thinks. They both like a tidy house. He's better in the kitchen, she's better at laundry.

A tiny part of her was worried that their relationship would change, being out of the craziness they met in and into some kind of normalcy back home. But it hasn't... it has only deepened it. She's only getting more and more crazy about him. It's weird, in a way she has no idea what she's doing but at the same time she's doing exactly what she wants. She's never been too concerned about relationships

really. There's been some brief ones, but never anything real serious. These feelings, they're on a whole new level. So she's not really sure how people handle it so she just does what comes naturally too her. Which apparently is falling for the sweetest guy in the world during a life and death situation and then moving in with him at the first opportunity because all she's sure about is she wants to be around this guy as much as possible. She's kind of 0 to 100 like that.

Important things she already knew about Jonathan: He's funny, kind, selfless, brave, talented, willing to put himself between her and danger, great in bed and real cuddly. Important things she's learnt since moving in with him: He's a great cook, he's good at Scrabble but not better than her, he loves Chinese food, he owns more Joan Baez records than Bob Dylan which pleases her and he calls his mom and brother several times a week. Which she finds endearing, and inspiring. Well she still doesn't call home that much but it does inspire her to call Mike more. Turns out he's actually pretty nice to talk to, when he's not being an ass. But he's grown up a lot.

Their sort-of-routine stays basically the same throughout the summer. If Jonathan gets off work first he gets home and starts on dinner, if she does she usually picks something up on the way instead. They eat, relax on the couch with each other. When they both have time off they explore the city together. Explore each other. One day in August she comes home to him staring into the pan on the stove with what she at first thinks is intense focus but quickly realizes really is because his mind is elsewhere.

"Hey."

"Oh! Hey," he jolts a little, so lost in thought he must've missed her coming in.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, yeah sorry, was just thinking."

"About what?" She asks while embracing him from behind, stepping on her tiptoes to kiss his cheek, a kiss he leans into. She then rests her head against his shoulder blades while waiting for his reply.

"Well uh, I got an interesting call. An offer," he starts. She pulls back and he turns around to look at her fully.

"Oh?"

"From the Times."

"Oh?" She perks up, intrigued.

"Yeah. You didn't know?"

"No. Why would I?"

"No, I didn't think so I just thought... like whatever, if you'd mentioned me to the people in charge there or something."

"No, I haven't. Did you want me to?"

"No! No I mean uh, that would've been weird."

"Yeah, I agree. So I didn't. I mean you're the best photographer ever and I want us to have the best staff possible but it would be weird for me to suggest you."

"Right."

"And I would've asked you about it first."

"Right, yeah no I know, of course. Just wanted to check."

"Yes so- wait they offered you a job?!"

"Yes."

"What did you say?"

"That I had to think about it. And I wanted to talk to you about it."

"What's the deal?"

"Well, the pay is better than at AP. I'd get more to do, like responsibility wise. Could get to decide a bit more what I'm working on myself, within limits."

"That's great! So what's stopping you?"

"Nothing, really. I just wanted to talk to you about it because... would it be weird for you? If we were working together? I mean not together like that, necessarily, I mean if you don't want, but like me working at NYT too would it be weird for you, I don't know if people would think that you got me-"

He's rambling so she cups his face with both hands to silence him.

"Do you want the job?" She asks him point blank.

"Yes," he answers after a beat.

"Then you should take it."

"It wouldn't bother-"

"I want you to take it. I want you have the job you want. And also... if you want... I want to work more with you. We make a good team, I think. Don't you?"

"Yes!" He hurriedly answers. "Yes. Yes I want to work with you too."

"Good. Then you should take it! No one will think it's got anything to do with me. I mean NYT ran your photos long before you and I met in Saigon anyway. Everyone knows you're a great photographer, Jonathan. No one will think it's weird. Everyone will be happy to have you."

"Right. Right yes I should take it. I want to take it," he says and sounds a bit giddy which she finds adorable. Then again it's exactly how she feels about the prospect of working together with Jonathan again. She stands on her tiptoes to kiss him again, this time on the lips, smiling into it.

"Can't wait to work with you."

"Me either."

So they become colleagues. And a team once again. And no one has any problems with it, since neither is above the other in the pecking order – she's a senior reporter, he's a senior photographer – and their

bosses just care that they get the job done. Which they do, as a team. Given their background they're put primarily put on covering the anti-war movement and protests spreading throughout the country. Occasionally dipping into the campaign trail for the presidential election since it pertains to it. The campaign trail is a shit storm. What an election year. Starting out with the MLK assassination affecting it all of course. Continuing with the RFK assassination leaving the Democrats with Humphries as their best candidate but he seems powerless against the Republican, Nixon – who she personally wouldn't trust with anything, but her dad loves of course – and the lunatic racist Wallace running as an Independent and getting traction in the south. It's all chaos. And underlying everything is the war, which LBJ seems to do a good job of continuing to screw up in his last months in office.

They're on the road a lot, to cover the protests, bouncing between different college campuses up and down the East Coast to cover the growing movement. They get good stories, he gets great photos. She manages to establish connection so she eventually has sources directly within different organizations, including the Weathermen, and thereby often being the first one on a story.

A thought, a feeling, keeps running through her for days and weeks and months. It hits her as Jonathan smiles at her when she steps into the apartment after a long day at work in July. It returns as he leaves a trail of kisses down her neck late at night in bed. As he's talking to his mom on the phone a regular Thursday. As he holds her in his arms and whispers sweetnothings in her ear when she wakes up from a nightmare. As he's rubbing circles on her back while they ride the subway into work an August morning. As he's giving her a piggyback ride home from a bar on a Saturday night in September. As he's concentrating deeply while developing photos from a rally at Columbia in October. As he's quietly singing along to Sunday Morning by the Velvet Underground. Again and again it returns. So finally she voices it, one day when they're in his car driving to the city after covering a rally at Harvard.

"I love you."

He turns his head and looks at her. Looks at her in that way which makes her feel all warm and fuzzy inside. Which makes her want to

kiss him, hug him, cuddle him, straddle him, all at once. He pulls off to the side of the road and suddenly he's kissing her all over. Her lips, cheek, nose, chin, lips again over and over while repeating the sentiment back to her, over and over. She reciprocates as best she can through her giggles.

Five important things happens in November: LBJ calls a brief ceasefire in Vietnam. Nixon wins the election. Yale announces it's going co-ed. The US bombs Laos. And in time for Thanksgiving Lucas comes home.

They're in Jonathan's childhood home on the Tuesday, getting schooled at gin rummy by his mom, when the phone rings. Will answers and then hurriedly relays that her little brother said they had to get to Maple Street right away because "Oh my god Lucas is back!" so they leave right away.

The Sinclairs front lawn is filled with people when they get there. Mike, Dustin, Holly and her parents are all there along with Mr. and Mrs. Sinclair, Erica and Lucas. And Max, who's got her arms around Lucas and looking like she won't ever want to let go. Will darts out of the car to hug Lucas, they follow suit.

"Welcome home! This is great! How did you get home, now?" She asks.

"Being injured twice bought me my ticket back," Lucas grins, pointing to his leg and shoulder. Max's beaming smile fades a little.

"Shit man, you okay?" Jonathan asks.

"Yeah it's alright, at least I'm here now instead of over there in that hellhole."

"Yeah, that's great," she smiles and tucks some loose strands of hair behind her ear as she naturally tucks herself into Jonathan's side. Lucas eyes them with a bemused expression.

"So, you guys are still just colleagues, I take it?" He jokes, causing both her and Jonathan to blush and grin.

The Sinclairs, and Max, have a lot of catching up to do of course so they soon leave them to it. Lucas, Max, Mike, Will and Dustin does make plans to meet up the next day though, and include them in it.

Which is how they find themselves at the Hideaway, the only bar in town, the day before Thanksgiving. It's sort of odd to be there since neither of them ever stepped foot there while still living here. And with their little brothers no less, she's shared the very occasional beer with Mike previously in her apartment when he's come to visit, but Mike looks weirdly grown up now when she sees him in a bar. But it's nice. They've all grown up. And she likes Mike and his friends. Will is so sweet, kind and interesting to talk to. Dustin is goofy but smart. Max is fun and she loves her attitude, taking no shit from anyone. Lucas is caring and thoughtful.

"- you should've seen them when we drove over a mine and the truck flipped, we all fell out but Jonathan barely hit the ground before he was up and freaking out over Nancy."

Lucas is telling the group his version of their encounters in Vietnam which differs slightly from theirs.

"Hey of course I was worried that-" Jonathan protests while she smiles up at him and nudges his side.

"Yeah yeah sure, of course," Lucas cuts him off. "And then later, after *I saved you guys* from that crazy NVA guy you guys just stood there staring at each other forever while I was like hello, can we get out of here please, we're in the middle of a jungle swarming with the enemy, stop making hearteyes at each other and let's go!"

"Hey now it wasn't like that it was just-" It's her turn to protest because it really wasn't... quite like that. Kind of.

"Right, sure. You guys are like nauseatingly close," Mike says and scrunches up his nose.

"Oh boo-hoo Mike. Let's talk about your love life instead, shall we?" She bites back.

Mike looks horrified and both Will and Dustin looks like they're about to comment on it when they're interrupted by a new voice.

"Look at this, Midnight is back in Hawkins!"

A guy who looks to be about the same age as Mike and his friends have strolled up to their table, looking smug.

"Go away, Troy," Mike says.

"Shut up Frogface. I just wanted to congratulate Sinclair on making it back, I thought the whole point of sending *you people* over there was to get rid of you."

A hush falls over the table for half a second.

"What the fuck is your problem?" She demands to know.

"Why don't you shut the hell up you asshole?" Max spits out.

"You should shut it, what you two are up to... damn unnatural," Troy continues.

Max flies up out of her seat, fuming. She gets up herself too right after. This guy has to be dealt with. She notices Lucas wincing a bit as he gets up after Max. She doesn't have to look to know Jonathan is behind her as always.

"Say that again you inbred prick," Max challenges.

"Gladly. Should be outlawed, as a matter of fact."

Max looks ready to fly off the handle but she notices Lucas subtly holding her back a little. Understandably wanting to avoid a physical confrontation. It's unnecessary. She steps forward instead, getting in Troy's face because damn this idiot needs to be told off.

"Hey Asshole, what the hell is your problem? Did you actually fucking swallow a Wallace leaflet?"

"Who are you? This doesn't concern you. Why don't you sit yourself down, little lady."

She registers that the whole place is suddenly quiet except for them.

"Why don't you shut the hell up and crawl back to your mother's basement? It does concern me when you spew your stupid, backwards, ignorant fucking hate speech and bother my friends," she throws back and jabs him in the chest with a finger to drive home her point.

"Bitch just shut it, you don't know a thing-"

"Little boy, the amount of stuff I know that you don't is staggering. Shut up and go away."

"Bitch, I'll go when this ni-"

For the first time in her life, she slaps someone. She can't think of anything else to do, she just want this idiot to shut up. And she achieves the goal, at least momentarily, as he instantly quiets when her palm connects with his cheek. Her only regret later is that she didn't just go for the straight up punch instead.

Troy is incensed, grabs onto her collar and shoves her. She stomps on his foot to get loose at the same time as Jonathan in a flurry comes forward and gets Troy off her. He shoves him away several feet. Troy, with a red hand imprint on his cheek and a frail male ego, is ready for a fight. Jonathan calmly stands his ground in front of her, Lucas and Max. Troy has just bawled his fists up when he's interrupted by someone coming up from behind and placing a large hand on his shoulder.

"You're coming with me."

Officer Powell, cool and confident in uniform, makes Troy completely flustered.

"H-hey y-you can't-" He tries, but is cut off.

"You're drunk, and disorderly. You're bothering other patrons. You're out. With me, come come," Officer Powell calmly explains before quickly and effortlessly cuffing Troy's hands behind his back and leads him out the door.

"You okay?" Jonathan quietly murmurs. She nods and squeezes his fingers to let him know.

"You guys okay?" She asks, looking at Lucas and Max.

"Yeah," Lucas shrugs and Max nods.

The night's kind of ruined so they leave and head home.

"What a fucking asshole," Dustin says what they're all thinking.

"It is what it is," Lucas sadly notes. Max clutches his arm tighter.

"I'm so tired of this. These idiots," Max sighs. Lucas nods.

"Can't wait to get out of here," Lucas says.

"What's your plan? I mean, what will you do now that you're home?" She asks.

"Not really sure. Mr. Hammond said he'd be happy to have me back at the diner if I want to. So might stay here, work a little. But I'd rather go west," Lucas says, looking at Max. "In any case for next fall. For college."

They all nod.

"Sounds good. Would be nice to have someone else here in the meantime. Hawkins is boring as hell without you guys," Will says. With the money Jonathan's brought in he's hoping to go to college next fall. Preferably at NYU, Tisch. Or RISD.

"True. We'll have our fun though. And you guys best come and visit," Lucas smiles and pats Will's back before shooting looks at the others.

"Definitely, I'm close-by," Mike notes.

They get to spend Thanksgiving together as her mother invites the Byers over. She's glad to spend it with Jonathan of course, and Mike is happy to have Will over. She has an inkling of worry that her mom bulldozed over whatever traditions the Byers have, maybe they wanted to spend it together just the three of them, but Jonathan assures her his mother was just happy and immediately onboard with the idea. And it's nice. She's sure her father grumbled a bit at first since he wants everything to be the same every year, but it's mom

who runs the house and therefore decides. As long as he gets to talk a bit about Nixon, her dad is happy, so they let him do that for a bit, he's otherwise mostly quiet as the rest of them talk about life, work, college, New York and everything.

"I'm thankful for my wonderful family," her mother says, as she does every year, and then adds: "And especially that my eldest came home in one piece."

She finds it a bit cringey but smiles politely at her mother, and father who adds "here here" to that sentiment.

"Oh, same here, I'm so thankful that you came home, you two, together. And that you are happy together," Mrs. Byers, or Joyce as she insists on Nancy calling her, says and it's so genuine it makes her smile.

"Yeah, same I guess," Mike mumbles, embarrassed. He's always hated the giving thanks ritual. It almost makes her chuckle.

"Yeah I'm really thankful. Jonathan. For everything," Will says and shares a look with his brother who nods.

"I'm thankful I found you," she says quietly and looks at Jonathan while squeezing his hand under the table.

"Same," he says back just as quietly. They both prefer to keep this stuff more private. It's quiet for a second before Holly breaks the tension by piping up to announce that she's thankful for her Raggedy-Ann doll.

Christmas they split between their families though, they roll into town on the 23rd, then spend Christmas Eve with her family and Christmas Day with his. His family is so sweet, his childhood home so warm and cozy. Just like him. They go back to New York in time for New Year's Eve. They stand on top of the NYT building and toasts to the end of a tumultuous 1968 and the start of a new year which might be as chaotic but at least they'll have each other from the start. She kisses as fireworks go off all around them and thinks, not for the first time, that she wants him this close forever.

In early April they're back in Hawkins once again, to celebrate Joyce's birthday. They have some time off to claim so they stay over and spend the next day in Hawkins too, to unwind. After a nice, long, slow breakfast with Will and Joyce the two of them decide to go out for a walk. They go on a long trek through the woods. He points out where he and Will built Castle Byers years ago. They walk all the way through the woods to the Quarry, and stare down into the abyss, before turning and slowly walking back.

As soon as they step foot in his backyard again the backdoor flies open and his mother runs out.

"Finally, there you are! Hurry, come quick!" She almost shouts and motions for them. They hurry their steps.

"What happened? Is everything okay?" Jonathan asks while they quickly step into the house.

"Yes everything is okay, it's amazing!" Joyce excitedly says while ushering them into the living room where they find her parents, Holly and Will. The TV is on, as is the radio.

"What's going on?" She asks.

"You've won the Pulitzer Prize!" Will shouts, practically jumping up and down.

She can't quite comprehend the information.

"You won the Pulitzer?!" Jonathan turns to her, beyond excited.

"No, you won it!" Will exclaims.

"Jonathan won the Pulitzer?!" She can't believe it, she feels like her face might split in two she's grinning so wide. This is amazing, and so well-deserved and-

"NO. YOU TWO BOTH WON PULITZERS," everyone in the room, even Holly and her father, says in unison now.

"What?" They harmonize in turn. This is once again confusing. How-

"Look, they're talking about it again now," Will says, pointing to the TV.

It's tuned in to the local news. She tries to comprehend what the greying old man behind the desk is saying.

"The esteemed Pulitzer Prizes for excellence in journalism conducted during last year was awarded today – and it turned out to be a triumph for Hawkins-bred journalists! The prize for Investigative Reporting was awarded to Nancy Wheeler of the New York Times for her coverage of the Vietnam War, specifically her reporting on the March 14th Massacre when she uncovered to the world atrocities and war crimes committed by US soldiers in the Saigon region. Photographer Jonathan Byers, previously with AP and now with New York Times as well, was awarded the prize for Breaking News Photography for his reporting on Saigon bombing on March 13th. The jury also gave a nod to his photographs of the March 14th Massacre. Wheeler and Byers, who were both born in Hawkins, collaborated on reporting from both incidents that the Pulitzer committee deemed prizeworthy. We have tried to reach both but have so far been unable to get a hold of them. Until we do get a hold of them all us here at the station would like to extend our congratulations to Hawkins own, Nancy Wheeler and Jonathan Byers."

The phone starts ringing and Will hurries to answer it.

"They've been calling all day, the news, NYT, AP, Mike, everyone! Jesus, can't believe you missed this!"

She's at a loss for words. She looks to Jonathan who seems to be in the same position.

"Congratulations sweetheart!" Her mother exclaims and Joyce pulls them both into a hug before Will is shoving the receiver into her hand saying it's her editor calling for the eighth time.

They spend the whole afternoon on the phone. Sometimes her, sometimes he, sometimes both switching the receiver back and forth during the same call. While at the same time their families won't stop going on about how amazing this is. Her father even goes out and buys champagne, she's never seen him be this... proud, or excited

before. It's not until early evening that it starts to calm down a bit with calls. It's been a whirlwind of an afternoon. She still can't really make heads or tails of this. Even after endless phone calls and phone interviews where she, they, have humbly expressed their gratitude and surprise. This is huge. Reputation wise. And just straight up financially. The prize money...

She loves her family. His family. But Jesus, she can't think when they're all talking at once like this, like they have been doing for a while now. She takes Jonathan's hand and pulls him with her outside, under the others protests (though Joyce quiets them), saying they need some air. They go out back again and sit down on the porch.

"You alright?" He asks, putting an arm around her.

"Yeah I just couldn't think, in there, with everyone."

"Right."

"This is huge."

"Yeah."

"What do we do now?"

"I don't know. I suppose just... keep doing what we're doing? Must be doing something right."

"Yeah... yes. But this must surely change... how people see us... more will... know us, now, I guess?" She's thinking out loud.

"I guess. But will it change how we are? What we do?"

"No... no not for me," she realizes.

"Not for me either."

"But just the money... is huge in itself."

"Yeah... I don't... oh," he cuts himself off as he realizes something.

"What?"

"I can pay for... Will... college. More than just the first year now."

"Oh! That's great! That's great, Jonathan."

"Yeah, it is."

"That's good, that's real good," she continues mulling over what the prize actually means in reality. "This is good. This is good," she reaches something of a conclusion.

"Yeah, it is."

"I suppose I'll save... and pay down debt."

He nods.

"Hey," he says quietly. She turns her head and looks him in the eye. He smiles softly at her. She finds herself mirroring it. "Congratulations," he says.

"Congratulations to you," she mirrors him again and captures his lips with her own.

They break apart. She rests her forehead against his temple.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

She stands up and offers her hand, helping him up. Hand in hand they'll head back inside to face the onslaught of their giddy family members again. Then they'll face the rest of the world. She's ready to face anything, with his hand clasped in hers.

3. Chapter 3

"There they are again!"

She points towards the figures in the upper left corner of the photo.

"I knew I saw them there," Jonathan nods.

"That's now at least sixteen different protests they've been at, all over the place. Penn, Boston, Columbia, Yale..." she quickly rattles off, petering out as her point is made.

"Yeah," Jonathan nods again.

"And we've spotted them in the moment several times, but still we haven't gotten a word with them. How can we keep missing them?" She poses the question and glances up at him. They're huddled closed together in the NYT darkroom, peering over the photos Jonathan took of the anti-war protest at Fordham earlier.

"They're discreet, good at hiding when they want to, I guess," Jonathan reasons.

"Hm. From cops? Sure, but why from us? I get that not everyone likes journalists but why hide? Get a chance to get your word out or you know, just tell us off."

"Maybe they're paranoid? Feel like they have a lot to hide, a lot to lose?" Jonathan suggests.

"Hm. Maybe. Ugh, we need to get them."

They've been continuously working on covering the anti-war movement within in the larger counterculture movement for months now. Covering protests and through rigorous work in establishing contacts and trust they've managed to highlight a lot of the different groups and factions in the large and fragmentized movement. Talking with people within different student groups, with the Women's League, with Black Panthers, and many others, even the Weathermen. Through Lucas, who's become part of it, they could do a great piece on Vietnam Veterans Against the War. But it's one group

that currently intrigues them the most. Because they're so evasive and small. They're not even sure they're a group, like organized. But they're at every protest, the same little clique of six people that stick close together. They're loud and persistent. And always right in the middle of it, if anything ever goes down at a protest they're always right where the action is but to her knowledge have never been taken in or anything. And there's just something about them that intrigues her. How small the group is, how mobile it is and the mix of people it seems to consist of makes it stand out.

She's just got this feeling there's something special about them. That they're a part of the movement they haven't written about before. But so far they've just got photos of the clique of six people, four women and two men, and one out of six names. Kali. Asking around a lot, exhausting all her contacts that's all she got. That the young woman with long black hair and golden skin is called Kali. She seems to be the leader of the little group. The other five members are still a mystery. There's a young white girl, looking like a teenage runaway, who always keeps close to Kali. She observed them once and Kali seemed protective of the girl, the girl seemed to never leave her sight. Then there's a black woman with an afro, a white hippie girl with long hair, some white guy always in a leather jacket and a large, stocky black man. That mix of people is intriguing in itself, usually it's more segregated, Black Panthers and other African-American groups for themselves, women's groups for themselves, etc, but in this little group people from seemingly diverse backgrounds have come together.

"We'll get them. No one can hide from Pulitzer Prize winner Nancy Wheeler for too long," Jonathan smiles and presses a kiss to her temple.

"You really gotta stop calling me that," she smiles and bashfully looks down.

"You spelled it out about me on my birthday cake," he argues.

"No I didn't, your mom did. I just supported the idea," she grins back.

"Fair enough."

They walk out of the darkroom and heads back towards the bullpen area where she has her desk. They're nearly done for the day, she just has to pick up her things.

"So what do you want do for dinner, should we get pizza or Chinese?" She asks him as they walk over to her desk.

"Or we could cook," he smirks.

"More like you cook and I tell you how pretty you are," she jokes back. But not really because that's kind of what they do.

"That's always fine be me," he smiles. "But eh, maybe pick up something I feel-"

"Hey Jonathan," the intern Katie suddenly interrupts. "There's someone here to see you," she continues and gestures to a man with dark hair that's greying at the temples and some five o' clock shadow.

"Hey son," the man says.

Their happy, playful mood is gone right away as Jonathan instantly goes rigid. She looks from him to his father, a man she barely has any personal recollection of but who he's told her about. What he's told her is enough for her to want to throw Lonnie Byers out the window. Lonnie walks up to them with a smile. Jonathan stares at his father in disbelief and with thinly veiled contempt. He told her he hasn't seen his father since he walked out on the family when Jonathan was 14. Beat Jonathan and call him worthless for years then disappear for nine, only to now out of the blue appear. What's changed? She knows what's changed. Pulitzer Prize winner Jonathan Byers. Suddenly there's money to the Byers name.

"Long time no see," Lonnie grins.

"What are you doing here?" Jonathan breathes out.

"Came to see you, son!" Lonnie continues and sticks out his hand. Jonathan doesn't move a muscle.

"Go away," she tells Lonnie in her best steely voice, stepping forward and positioning herself in front of Jonathan. Her focus is on Lonnie

but she notices the rest of the room has gone quite, watching the exchange.

"And who are you?" Lonnie keeps that smug fake grin on his face and extends his hand towards her instead. She crosses her arms over her chest.

"Doesn't matter to you. You should go away now."

"Well, nice to meet you too," Lonnie rolls his eyes and looks past her. "Look son, I know it's been a while-"

"Nine years," she interrupts.

"- but you've done alright for yourself and I've been thinking maybe we could talk. I know we've had our differences-" *Differences?! That's one way of putting it.* Another would be child abuse.

"You should be thrown in jail," she interrupts again.

"Lady," Lonnie's patience seems to be wearing thin, he stops to compose himself a little before continuing. "Would you let me talk to my son?"

"Jonathan, do you want to talk to him?" She quickly asks, knowing the answer.

"No," Jonathan says.

"There you go. You can go now," she tells Lonnie again.

"Jesus Christ," Lonnie sighs. "Son come on, stop hiding behind this broad and let's talk man to man."

"Katie, get security," she tells the intern who's been standing frozen in spot off to the side watching the whole time like the rest of the office.

"No! Goddamnit who the fuck are you to-" Lonnie boils over at that and takes a rough hold of her arm to move her out of the way. Before she can even try to get loose, Jonathan has stepped forward and forced Lonnie off of her. He grabs Lonnie by the collar.

"Don't. Touch. Her," he hisses to his father in a low voice. Several co-

workers stepped forward as it turned physical but hang back, watching, as Jonathan looks in control.

"Look at you, suddenly you're tough in front of the girl?" Lonnie scoffs.

"Fuck off," Jonathan spits out, pushing Lonnie away.

"But I know you. Once a coward, always a coward. Shit, you went to 'Nam but didn't bring a gun, but a damn camera. Because you're a coward," Lonnie mockingly throws back.

"You think a gun makes you tough? Christ, you're pathetic," She throws back at Lonnie. "He went into a war zone unarmed. He didn't blink, staring down the barrel of a gun to protect me. That's real toughness," she lays it out. She hears Rachel, Anne, Eddie and several other co-workers near draw in sharp intakes of breath and she realizes then that they never told their colleagues about that bit before.

Lonnie scoffs but and searches for a comeback. Katie returns with Harold and Louis from security. The two large men stride up towards them.

"Him, take him out. Don't ever let him in again," she tells them, pointing at Lonnie.

"Yes ma'am," Louis answers while he and Harold both clasp down a large hand each on Lonnie's shoulders before grabbing an arm each with the other, forcibly leading him out the door.

"Nice seeing you, son," Lonnie sarcastically throws out as parting words as he's dragged off.

"Go to hell," she throws back.

She reaches out for Jonathan's hand. He clasps it tightly and looks at her.

"You okay?" He whispers.

"Yes, are you?" She whispers back, tucking herself into his side and

wrapping her arm around his back.

"Yes," he nods.

"Oh my God I am so sorry," Katie steps forward looking guilty.

"It's okay. You didn't know," Jonathan says. She nods in agreement and Katie seems to breathe out, relaxing a little. Others come up to them and starts offering sympathies and the like. They nod and thank them but quickly excuse themselves to get out of there. She just wants to take Jonathan home, get him away from all the people. They're well-meaning, but knowing him – which she gotta say she does pretty well at this point – he wants privacy. They need to talk about this alone, in peace.

They take the subway home and pick up a pizza on the way. She never lets go of his hand. They settle on the couch with their pizza, she sits down next to him and he raises his arm right away so she smiles and tucks herself into his side. He puts his arm around her, holding her close. She offers him a slice before taking one herself.

"How do you feel?" She asks.

"I can't believe he just showed up like that."

"Yeah."

"After all these years, just like that. Soon as I get some money to my name he rolls in and acts like... like that."

"I know."

"So transparent and..."

"Dumb," she finishes for him.

"Yeah," he agrees. "Did he seriously think he could just waltz in like... like nothing's happened?"

"He's a leech. An evil leech."

"Yeah. I hate him."

"Me too. I wish I could've hit him with something. He should go to hell," she says firmly.

"I love you," he replies with a small smile.

"I love you too," she answers.

"Wish everyone hadn't been there to see it..." he pensively continues.

"I know."

"Now everyone's gonna think that I'm-"

"An amazing guy with a piece of shit father."

He looks at her quizzically.

"You-"

"That's what they think," she interrupts again, insisting. "I wish he hadn't been there. I wish it hadn't been so public. He's a piece of shit. But that shouldn't be something for you to be ashamed of. So you have a piece of shit father and now they all know that. Do you think they all got dandy fathers in their lives? And they'll still see you the same way they did. That you're an amazing guy, an awesome photographer and great co-worker. It'll still be that, plus then the addage that you're all that in spite of growing up with that asshole as father, which just makes you more amazing!" She finishes, determined to get him to see what an amazing guy he is.

He's staring at her. He suddenly leans down and plants a big kiss on her cheek.

"You had some sauce on your face. That's what I was gonna say. I got it though, don't worry," he smirks when he pulls back.

"Oh."

"Thank you, though," he smiles and kisses her again, on the lips this time. "You... you really think so?" He then asks in a more serious tone.

"I know so. Do you know what Maggie, Rachel, Anne, Kristy and Liz all said to me after they had met you?"

"No?"

"Hold onto him Nancy, he's a keeper!" or variants there of."

That makes him blush.

"And last fall I overheard Mr. Bradley tell Mr. Norman that you were the best recruit for the photo division they've done in this decade."

"How did you hear that?"

"I'm an intrepid reporter, I hear everything and have countless ways of gathering information," she tells him with confidence.

"Of course," he chuckles. "But...?"

"Okay, I heard that because I snuck into the breakroom to snag one of the cupcakes Debbie brought in before they were all gone and they were talking in the corridor outside and didn't know I was there," she admits.

"Hey why didn't you grab two?" He jokingly pouts.

"I would have but you were out shooting with Arnie that day."

"Ah."

"But anyway... seriously, Jonathan. Yeah it sucks this happened, and so publicly. But you're awesome and everyone knows that and this doesn't change that."

Slowly, he nods.

"Thanks. Thank you for what you did today," he tells her.

"I'd do it all over again, every time. Maybe kick him in the balls too though."

A few days later they're in the Oscar Wilde Memorial Bookshop on

Mercer Street, looking for a birthday present for Will. She's leafing through Isherwood's *A Single Man*. Jonathan's searching the poetry section.

"Well what does the child like to read?" Anthony, a friend of theirs who works in the shop calls over from where he's stocking the new releases section.

"He's not a kid anymore, he turns 20, Anthony," Jonathan shakes his head. "And well, Tolkien and comic books but a lot of different stuff too."

"Oh, I love comic books!" Anthony exclaims. "They're drawn so wonderfully generous. You know I tried to convince Mark that we should do Batman and Robin as a couples costume for the Halloween last year but that crank wouldn't do it."

"Who would've been who?" She asks.

"Darling please, Mark would've been Robin of course," Anthony answers.

"Of course," she smiles.

"So what did you end up going as?" Jonathan asks.

"He went as Judy Garland and I had to throw together a Warhol costume at the last minute," Anthony sighs. "Ugh, anyway. Has the boy read Capote?"

"No, don't think so," Jonathan answers.

"What?! God I don't understand gay kids these days," Anthony throws his hands in the air and hurries off to another shelf, returning with a copy of *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. "Let's start him off with this one. It's good, and quite sweet. It doesn't have a downer ending, I can't stand it when they end all the gay books with one. It's like God if I wanted to be depressed I'd live in the real world," Anthony says, holding out to Jonathan.

"Sounds great, thanks," Jonathan smiles as they head over to the register.

"Give him my best. And you got to bring him out here soon! Imagine being gay and stuck in the Midwest!" Anthony continues as he rings up the book.

"Aren't you from Ohio?" She asks.

"Yes so I know what I'm talking about!"

"Sure, well he's coming out here later in the spring or the summer I think," Jonathan informs Anthony.

"That's nice. Hey, what are you two doing tonight? Mark and I are going to-" Anthony starts but she doesn't hear the rest of the sentence, distracted by what she sees outside the shop window as she happens to glance through it. Or who, rather.

"Isn't that..." she trails off, hurrying to open the door and lean out of it to look further down the street to see if the figure who walked past really is who she looked like.

"Nancy?" Jonathan comes over to her.

Visual sighting confirmed. She ducks her head back inside.

"We have to go! Bye Anthony!" She quickly calls and pulls Jonathan with her. He throws a quick goodbye over his shoulder to the puzzled Anthony and follows.

"See the blonde? With the burgundy pants," she asks him and nods as she leads him with her to follow the person from a safe distance.

"Yeah."

"It's the hippie girl! In Kali's group," she explains. They've taken to simply call them that since that's all they really know.

"Oh, it is," Jonathan nods, stuffing the book away in his messenger bag.

"I just wanna see where she goes, maybe she's meeting the others," she tells him.

Jonathan nods. The girl has turned left onto 8th Street and they follow, careful to keep their distance. She then turns onto 5th Avenue for two blocks before heading west on 10th Street. This peaks her interest further, because she happens to know from a source that the Weathermen secretly uses a townhouse just around the corner as a safe house. The Village is full of artists, writers, hippies, drifters and general anti-establishment folk. The likelihood of the mysterious protest group being here too is good.

Finally the girl stops by an abandoned threestorey apartment building and walks right in. They stand on the sidewalk for a minute.

"Should we..." she suggests. She wants to go inside. See what's up.

"I think so," Jonathan nods.

"I bet the others are there. Key is we just go in calmly, make clear we're not there to confront them, we're just curious."

He nods.

In the lobby of the derelict building the walls are covered with graffiti and there's a distinct odor of urine. There's newspapers strewn in a corner, looking like a hobo might sleep there in the night but right now it's empty. They listen but can't hear a sound. Quietly they climb the first flight of stairs, careful not to make much noise. The first floor seems deserted. No light, no sounds. Old eviction notices are still on some doors. Presumably the building is set for demolition but has been caught in bureaucracy hell. Suddenly there's a sound, a thud, coming from the floor above. Breaking the crushing silence. They sneak up another flight of stairs. The second floor hallway is lit and there's one door ajar. She looks to Jonathan. He looks at her. He nods. Quietly they walk down the hallway. Listens. She can't hear anything. She knocks on the open door and waits. No response. They step inside.

It's dark inside the apartment. It's empty, apart from litter on the floor. Graffiti covers the walls here too. With Jonathan right behind her she continues into the next room. It's dark and empty as well but she can make out the contours of some objects along the wall, just not quite what it is yet.

Then things happen quickly. Suddenly out of nowhere someone grabs Jonathan from behind.

"Hey! Let him go!" She protests and kicks at the large figure. She gets in some hits before someone grabs her from behind too, locking her arms behind her back with the same vice grip the other person's got Jonathan. "Hey! Shit! Take it easy," she continues to protest.

Someone flips the switch and the bare lightbulb hanging from the ceiling illuminates the room. The girl known as Kali stands in front of her. Behind her stands the young girl with curly hair, the hippie they followed here and the leather jacket-wearing white guy. She looks to her right, to Jonathan who's trying to get loose but the black man holding him is much bigger and got him in a good grip.

"Who are you?" Kali spits out.

"Shit, relax. Let us go, we come in peace and all that," she answers.

"Who are you?" Kali repeats the question.

"They're narcs, I can smell a narc a million miles away," the leather jacket guy throws out.

"We're not fucking narcs," she rolls her eyes. "We're journalists."

Kali looks her over, skeptically. Steps forward and rips her purse off her and empties its contents on the ground. Keys, wallet, pens, pad, gum, tampons and all the rest tumbles out on the floor. Including her press pass which catches Kali's interest.

"Nancy Wheeler, reporter New York Times," she reads off it.

"Yes," she says. "Can you let us go now?"

Kali looks at her. Then looks at Jonathan. Steps towards him and takes his messenger bag. Then halts when she discovers the ever-present camera slung over his other shoulder and hastily takes that away from him too.

"Hey careful with that," she protests. Kali hands it over to the young girl who looks it over curiously.

Kali empties out Jonathan's bag on the floor too. His press pass tumbles out too along with keys, wallet, random photos of her or the two of them together that he's taken, *Other Voices*, *Other Rooms* and other assorted things.

"Jonathan Byers, photographer, New York Times," she reads off Jonathan's press pass.

"Yes, so can we all calm down?" She tries.

Kali steps towards Jonathan again and puts her hands to his chest, feeling around. She rips open his shirt, the top buttons coming off. Jonathan squirms as she feels around more.

"Hey!" She protests.

"He's not wearing a wire," Kali mutters and nods to the black guy who lets go of Jonathan. Then Kali turns to her, shoving her hands up under her sweater and feeling around over her chest.

"Okay, she's clean too. You can let her go Mick," she then nods to the girl holding her and finally she's free.

"Jesus," she mumbles while bending down to quickly gather her things and throwing them in her purse again. Jonathan corrals his things but doesn't get his camera back, yet. This girl is either followed by the CIA and the KGB or she's completely paranoid. She's leaning towards the latter.

"Who are you, how did you find this place and why are you here?" Kali demands, crossing her arms over her chest.

She stands up, instinctively drawing closer to Jonathan.

"You know who we are," she begins answering. "We recognized her on the street and followed her here," she continues, pointing at the hippie chick. "And we're curious about you," she finishes.

"Why?" Kali challenges.

"We've covered the war from the inside. Now we're covering the anti-war movement from the inside. You guys are at every protest all over

the place. So we're interested in you. Just like we're interested in the Weathermen, Black Panthers, WILPF, Veterans Against War, SDS and all the rest. But you've proved more evasive than all the others combined. We're interested in hearing you out. Hearing your cause, your motivations, your goals."

Kali scoffs.

"That's all," she shrugs. She glances around the room. It lacks furniture. There's some guns laying around. Boxes of ammunition in the corner. A typewriter by one wall, stacks of paper next to it. "If you'd want to get your word out... you could have your say through us," she suggests, motioning to the typewriter.

"I don't trust you. I don't trust reporters," Kali says.

"Okay," she answers.

"Kali," the young girl quietly says.

"Yes Jane?" Kali answers, turning around and huddling close to the girl who whispers something to her while looking at them. Kali listens, nods, responds, listens some more and then comes over to them again.

"March 14th massacre. That was you."

"Yes," she confirms.

"So you've won yourself a fancy prize. Is that why you went to 'Nam?"

"No."

"Why then?" Kali challenges.

"To get the truth," she honestly answers.

Kali scoffs and rolls her eyes.

"Give me the real answer, not some naïve idealistic little journalism school motto."

"That is my real answer," she throws back.

"Okay then Princess. Why did you come home then?"

Ignoring the namecalling, which gives her mild high school flashbacks of Carol, she answers truthfully again.

"Because I got it."

"Oh yeah? Well then, what is the truth? Enlighten us please," Kali mocks. Some of the others laugh but she notices the young girl doesn't, instead staying silent and watching her carefully.

"That it's a thousand times worse than you think. I was gonna say it'll end in disaster but it's really been an ongoing disaster from the start and they know it but it also means they won't stop. Which is it's own disaster."

"Okay then. Nancy Wheeler, reporter in search of the truth. With her trusty lapdog," Kali glances to Jonathan. She has to keep herself from giving her earful, the attitude is grating but damnit, this girl is a story. "What brings you here, truthseeker?"

"The world is changing, people are changing. I want to find out the future and the future is happening here."

"Hm..." Kali draws it out, like she's considering her words. "Admirable. But real talk now. What do you know about us?"

"That your name is Kali. And that her name is Mick, and her name is Jane. That you're everywhere. That you're armed. That you're writing something, which tells me you've got something you want to say to the world and I think it'd be easier for you to get it out there through us. And that you're either extremely careful for good reason or you're paranoid."

"That's all you've got? And you're supposed to be an awardwinning journalist?" Kali continues to mock her, trying to get a rise out of her. She won't bite.

"You're good at hiding," she shrugs.

"You keep flattering me. Is that lesson number 1 at journalism school?"

"Actually it's the second lesson. First one is all about punctuation and grammar. Rather boring."

That almost draws a chuckle from Kali but the woman composes herself quickly and returns to her serious demeanor.

"So that's all you know?"

"Yes."

"Good. Then get out," Kali tells them in a steely voice.

She thinks for a moment, considering her next move but those thoughts are put to rest when everyone but the girl called Jane brandishes guns and points them in their direction. Jane throws Jonathan's camera back to him and he instinctively catches it.

"We're going, jeez," she tells them, backing out of the room with Jonathan right behind her. "Call me if you want. All publicity is good publicity," she calls back when they're out in the hall.

Out on the street again they look back. No one's followed them out.

"You okay?" Jonathan asks.

"Yeah, you?" She answers, tucking herself into his side. He puts an arm around her.

"Yeah. We're not done with those guys, are we?"

"No. It just got interesting."